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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RIO DE JANEIRO 000172

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SUBJECT: AMB. LAGON VISITS RIO DE JANEIRO TO DISCUSS TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

11. (U) Summary. Ambassador Mark Lagon, Director of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) visited Rio de Janeiro on June 21-23 as part of a multi-city trip to Brazil. He consulted with various members of the NGO and academic community on the sexual exploitation of women and children and on forced labor issues. Amb. Lagon also visited a local girls shelter which received financial support from the U.S. Government as part of President Bush's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Initiative. End Summary.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

12. (U) Sexual exploitation of women and children in Rio de Janeiro is fueled by high demand from American and European tourists as well as from Brazilians of all social classes, explained Dr. Naanko Van Buuren, head of NGO Brazilian Institute for Innovation in Social Health (IBSS). Dr. Van Buuren further explained to Amb. Lagon how rampant police corruption compounds the problem. Corrupt Military Police officers regularly demand monetary bribes or sexual favors from prostitutes in exchange for allowing them to work on the streets; they also demand bribes from bar and club owners to avoid raids - failure to pay bribes can result in death. (Note: The very evening that Dr. Van Buuren made these comments, corrupt Military Officers killed seven people in one of Rio's slums for reportedly failing to pay tributes/bribes. End Note.) Civil Police officers, from the investigative arm of state law enforcement, are frequently involved in running brothels or other organized sexual services. Amb. Lagon suggested that Brazil's hosting of the "World Congress III Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents" in Rio de Janeiro on November 25-28, 2008, could be an excellent opportunity to "shine a light" on police corruption in Rio.

12. (U) Amb. Lagon's further discussions with Projeto Trama (an anti-trafficking NGO consortium), Projeto Excola (rehabilitation of street children NGO), and UNICEF revealed further insights. Interlocutors explained how corrupt police officers run brothels in which sexual services are sold for as little as 40 cents per minute, planned raids are often thwarted due to leaks of information within the law enforcement community, and victims' contact information is sometimes released as part of the official court record in a prosecution case which then makes them targets for retribution. The NGO representatives welcomed U.S. interest in the issue and expressed general approval of the Brazil's anti-trafficking efforts, but reported some problems such as getting officials statistics from the Federal Police to track trafficking crimes. NGO representatives also expressed concern that Brazil's anti-trafficking laws are outdated, and that the criminal-justice system does not provide sufficient attention to victims and protection to witnesses.

13. (U) Rio-based NGOs concentrate their efforts on victim assistance and other programs to rehabilitate children who have been exploited. Amb. Lagon visited one such project run by the City of Rio de Janeiro which received funding as part of the U.S. Anti-Trafficking in Persons Initiative, the Dalva de Oliveira Shelter for Adolescent Girls. The shelter is part of a municipal network, but specializes in severe cases. Housing eight girls ranging in age from 13-17, the

shelter provides temporary refuge for girls who have been abused or sexually exploited. In many cases, the girls have worked as prostitutes or have otherwise been victims of trafficking. Counselors work with the girls as well as their families to eventually reintegrate them into their communities and prevent further exploitation.

INTERNATIONAL TRAFFICKING

14. (U) Rio de Janeiro is not a main center from which to traffic children internationally, according to Dr. Van Buuren. Rather, the trend is for Brazilian boys to be sent to the Northeast region of Brazil as a staging point, then onward to countries like Suriname and Guyana where they receive false travel documents to enter the Netherlands or other European countries. From Rio de Janeiro, a large number of transvestites are trafficked to Europe, in particular to Milan, Italy. Some boys reportedly receive surgical procedures in Sao Paulo before being transported to Italy.

FORCED LABOR

15. (U) According to Father Ricardo Rezende, an academic expert on forced labor issues who heads the Slave Labor Research Group (SLRG) of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil's efforts regarding forced labor have progressed significantly in recent years and the number of people rescued from forced labor conditions is increasing. Father Rezende told Amb. Lagon that the government's national strategy is a major step forward and reported that a revision of the plan is currently underway. Though Brazil's slave labor law could be "stricter" and criminal punishment is still weak (offenders often avoid prison terms by providing "family baskets"), economic pressure on offenders is showing some positive results.

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The government's "dirty list," an official listing of companies and individuals involved in the commercial trade of goods produced by forced labor, motivates suppliers to disassociate themselves from producers who use forced labor since banks are not allowed to lend money to listed entities.

16. (U) Amb. Lagon mentioned that the U.S. is also working on its own, more general "dirty list" which identifies commodities from certain countries as possibly using forced labor such as cocoa from Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Father Rezende viewed the U.S. approach as too broad, arguing that it negatively slurs an entire industry for the actions of individual producers. Notably in Brazil, he explained, some production of sugarcane, cotton, meat, and charcoal uses forced labor - but it would be misleading to say that these industries as a whole use forced labor. Regarding the question of whether Brazil's rapidly expanding ethanol production is responsible for an increase in forced labor on sugarcane farms, Father Rezende noted the possibility of increased pressure on production volume but said that oversight in Sao Paulo (where most sugarcane production takes place) is more persistent, and that unscrupulous practices such as using child labor are usually not present. A more serious problem in Sao Paulo is over-exploitation of workers, who are paid based on productivity and subjected to high production requirements. Some workers have died as a result.

17. (U) This message was cleared/coordinated with Embassy Brasilia and the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

MARTINEZ